

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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One may find pleasure in varied pursuits, but one gains self-complacency, 'tis said, where pleasure is accompanied by the idea of oneself as cause.



THE body had been taken away and now we watched the firemen hosing down blood on the driveway beside the Medical Arts Building.

"Nobody saw him fall," Sergeant Allen said. "But two people heard him."

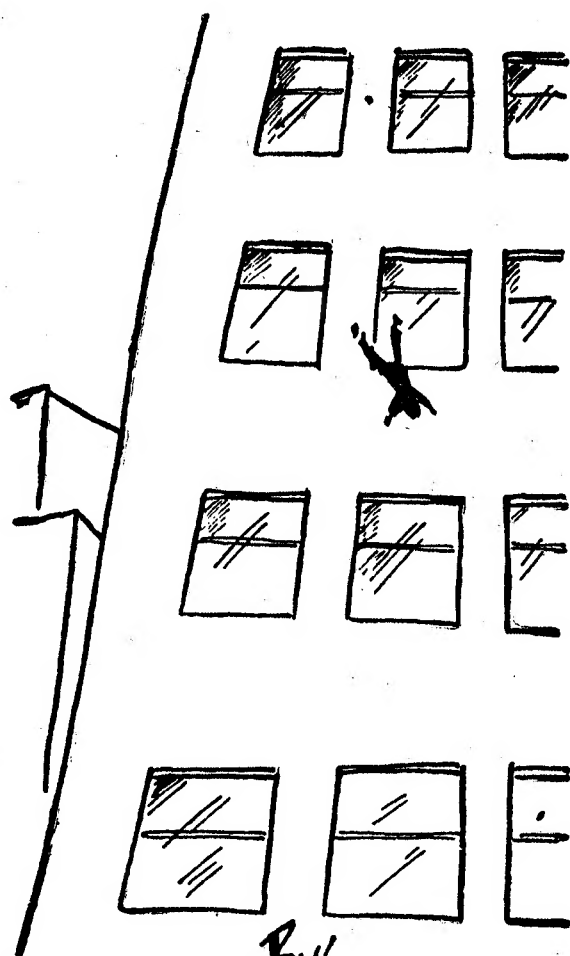
"He screamed?"

"No. But it's like dropping a paper bag of water, Lieutenant. Makes a noise and a splash. A Mrs. Corbin and her husband happened to be passing when it hap-

pened. She fainted when she saw what made the mess."

Floodlights illuminated the area where the firemen worked. I walked around a loop of hose and looked up the side of the five-story building.

Allen puffed his cigar. "When you fall, there's only one way to go. Straight down. If he didn't come from the roof, it was from one of those three windows—fifth, fourth, or third floors. He couldn't have fallen less than that or he



By
Jack
Ritchie

wouldn't have been in the condition he was."

"Who was he?"

"According to his wallet, his name was Thurmond Fraser. That's about all we know now."

A plainclothesman tiptoed through the water and joined us.

SWING HIGH

"He didn't jump from the roof."

I jiggled the car keys in my pocket. "What makes you so sure?"

"There's only one door leading up there and it's locked. Only the superintendent and the janitor have keys."

"Maybe he found a key that would work."

"It doesn't look like it. There's a thick coat of coal dust on the roof. He'd have had to leave footprints if he'd been up there. There weren't any."

I went to one of the floodlights and had it trained up the side of the building.

"When we got here," Allen said, "the third and fifth floor windows were open and people were leaning out. The fourth floor window was closed and dark. Just like it is now."

"Could he have climbed out of another window and worked his way along a ledge before he jumped?"

"There's no ledge. And he couldn't have climbed out on the sill and closed the window behind him before he jumped. It's only three inches wide."

I glanced at my watch. I had been off-duty when I'd heard about this on my car radio. "I guess you can handle this without my help, Sergeant. My wife's ex-

pecting me. I'll be home if anything develops."

I walked back to my car and drove to my apartment building.

My wife Mavis looked up from the fashion magazine when I entered. "You're late."

When I leaned over and kissed her, she turned a page of the magazine. "I had dinner early. Polly left something for you in the oven."

I went into the kitchen and put the roast on the table.

After a while Mavis appeared at the doorway. "We're going to the Dennisons tonight. They're having a small get-together. No special occasion."

I wondered if Philip Thompson would be there. Probably, if he knew that Mavis was coming.

"When we get there," Mavis said. "Try to look as though you were enjoying yourself."

I glanced up at the violet eyes. I doubted if she really cared whether I enjoyed myself or not.

She studied her manicure. "Don't dawdle. I promised we'd be there by nine."

The Dennison apartment was warm with the noise of a dozen people when we arrived. I took a drink from a tray and found a corner to stand in.

Mrs. Dennison made the rounds and spoke to me. "Any interesting

murders lately? A real chiller?"

"Nothing in particular."

She moved on to someone else.

I spent the evening watching Mavis and Philip Thompson. They spoke to each other only rarely, and no one would have known what I did about them.

At the office the next morning, Acting Detective Brooks came to me with the information Allen had left before he went off duty. "The floor plans of the third, fourth, and fifth floors are identical. Each one of the three windows we're investigating is the waiting room of a doctor."

He glanced at the folder in his hands. "Third floor. Dr. Abrams. Internal medicine. Three patients and his receptionist were in his waiting room when it happened. Seven-fifteen. They all swear they saw nobody jump, fall, or be pushed out of their window. And none of them ever heard of Thurmond Fraser before."

He continued. "Fourth floor. Dr. Warner. Dentist. But he had no night hours. The place was dark and the doors locked."

"Fraser still might have managed to get in some way."

"We didn't find any keys on his body and none of the doors to Warner's suite had been jimmied."

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closed it, and locked up the place again?"

"The only prints on the frame and sill of the window belong to Dr. Warner's dental technician. And at seven-fifteen she was eight miles away having dinner at home with her family and some relatives. We checked that out."

"Maybe someone wearing gloves opened the window."

"He would have been bound to smudge some of her prints. But they were clear."

"So that leaves us the fifth floor?"

Brooks nodded. "Dr. Gavin. Eye, ear, nose, and throat. One patient and the doctor's receptionist were in his waiting room at seven-fifteen. Neither one of them saw anything and they claim they never heard of Fraser before."

"Where was Dr. Gavin?"

"He didn't get to his office until seven-thirty."

"Did Thurmond Fraser have a car? Was it parked somewhere in the neighborhood?"

"In the parking lot behind the building. So evidently he drove, or was driven, there."

"Did anybody see him enter the building? The elevator operator?"

"Nobody saw him. And the elevator's automatic." Brooks pulled the coroner's report from the folder. "The doc takes an educated guess that Fraser fell or was

pushed from the fifth floor or the roof."

"Well, we can't question the roof."

Brooks had been ahead of me. "I've got Dr. Gavin's receptionist and the waiting patient outside. His name is Amos Howell and hers is Clara Nevens." He closed the folder. "Want me here when you talk to them?"

"It won't be necessary. Send one of them in when you leave."

Howell was a tall man who sat down gingerly. "I never heard of Thurmond Fraser until one of your men mentioned the name."

I let him light a cigarette and then said, "What time did you enter the doctor's waiting room?"

About ten to seven. I had a seven-fifteen appointment, but I like to be early."

"The door to the waiting room was unlocked?"

"Yes."

"Was there anyone else in the room?"

"No. It was empty."

"When did the receptionist arrive?"

"About five minutes later."

"Was the doctor in his office?"

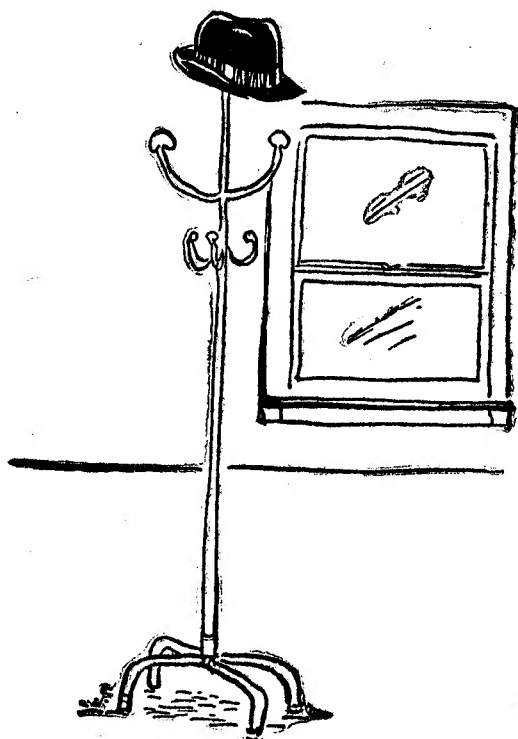
"No. I thought so, but he wasn't."

"Why did you think so?"

"His hat was hanging on the clothes tree."

I made a few lines on the scratch pad in front of me. "How do you know it was the doctor's hat?"

"Well, when he came in . . . about seven-thirty, it was, and after that man fell . . . he took it with him into his office."



I went back a little. "You say the receptionist arrived about five minutes after you did. What did she do?"

"She went to the doctor's door and tried it. It was locked and she told me that he'd probably be in in a few more minutes."

"And what did you do?"

"I read a magazine and she did some kind of office work. At about seven-twenty we heard the

sirens and they seemed to stop right below us. Miss Nevens opened the window and we both looked down. We saw all those people gathered around the body of that man. We were still there when Dr. Gavin came in a few minutes later. He asked us what had happened. Then he took the hat off the rack, unlocked the door to his office, and went inside. He came back ten seconds later and joined us at the window."

"Does Dr. Gavin have a separate entrance to his office from the corridor?"

"Yes, I think he has."

When I was through with Howell, I had Clara Nevens sent in.

She was small and dark-eyed. "I had supper and returned to the office at about five to seven."

"Was there anyone in the waiting room?"

"Yes. Mr. Howell."

"After you came in, what did you do?"

"I tried the doctor's door. Sometimes, if the doctor's in, he isn't aware that a patient may be waiting. But it was locked. He wasn't in yet."

"How long have you worked for Dr. Gavin?"

"About a month. His previous receptionist quit to get married."

"Just what kind of an employer is Dr. Gavin?"

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She hesitated. "All right, I guess." She colored faintly. "Well, sometimes he's a little too friendly. Or he was. But I told him I just wasn't interested. I have a boy friend."

I moved the ashtray on my desk back and forth a few times. "Does the doctor wear a hat?"

She seemed a little puzzled by the question. "Why, no, I don't believe so. At least I can't remember ever seeing him wear one."

When she left, Brooks came back into my office. "Find out anything interesting?"

"Maybe. What do we know about Thurmond Fraser?"

"He was in the construction business. Doing pretty well, judging from his address. Married three years ago. First time. He was about forty-five."

At noon I went to Lucco's Restaurant where I took a table in the balcony. I could look down on the main floor without being seen myself.

Twenty minutes later my wife and Philip Thompson took their usual table below me. It was the third time this week they had come here. They ordered cocktails, they touched hands, they smiled. And when they laughed I wondered if they were laughing about me. When they left at one-fifteen, I paid my tab and drove to the

Medical Arts Building directly.

Dr. Gavin was a large man with thick, hairy wrists and uneasy eyes. He led me into his office and closed the door behind me. "What can I do for you, Lieutenant?"

"Did you know Thurmond Fraser?"

"Is he the man who was killed here last night? No, I didn't."

"He wasn't a patient of yours?"

"No."

"What time did you get to your office last night?"

"About seven-thirty."

I glanced about the room. There was no sign of a hat rack or a hat. I indicated the door to my right. "You have a direct entrance to your office from the corridor?"

The doctor seemed to be perspiring. "Yes, but I seldom use it. Usually I come through the waiting room. I like to see if anyone is here. Some patient may have decided to come early and there's no point in having him sit there if I can take care of him right away."

"Do you usually come in at seven-thirty? I understand Mr. Amos Howell had a seven-fifteen appointment."

He rubbed a hand on the edge of his white jacket. "I usually try to be here at seven. But last night I stopped off for a sandwich and coffee at the cafeteria down the street."

"On your way back here, didn't you hear the sirens? Didn't they make you curious?"

"I heard the sirens, but we have a number of hospitals in the neighborhood and sirens aren't uncommon."

"Didn't you notice the crowd?"

"I came back from the Wells Street side of the building and I didn't see anything in particular. I just went upstairs and when I got here, Miss Nevens and Howell were leaning out of the window."

I considered asking him about the hat, but then I decided to save that ammunition for a time when I knew a little more about the doctor. I rose, said goodbye, and took the elevator down to the first floor. A pharmacy occupied one suite near the entrance and I went inside. It seemed logical to me that ninety percent of the prescriptions written by doctors in the building would be filled here.

I asked to see the manager and when he came, I showed him my badge. "I'd like you to go back through your prescription book."

He reached for one of several large volumes. "What should I look for?"

"The name Fraser."

I smoked two cigarettes before he paused at a page.

"Here's something. Fraser. Res-torinol. Proprietary name. Ear

drops. Do you want the date?"

"Who wrote the prescription?"

"Dr. Gavin. He's on the fifth floor." His eyes went back to the page. "She had the prescription filled about four months ago."

I took the new cigarette out of my mouth. "She?"

He nodded. "A Mrs. Helen Fraser."

I was about to pass the phone booth in the lobby when I remembered something else. I phoned my wife.

When she answered, I said, "Mavis, some of the boys at headquarters are going up north for hunting this weekend. They asked me to come along."

There was a pause and then she asked, "What time are you leaving?"

"We'll all meet at Lieutenant O'Brien's house about nine."

"When will you be back?"

"Late Sunday night. Are you sure it will be all right if I go? You won't be lonely?" I wondered if she smiled.

"No. I won't be lonely. I'll probably look up some of the girls."

I looked up the Thurmond Fraser address and drove there.

Helen Fraser had green eyes, a small, speculative smile, and evidently the death of her husband had not been a traumatic experience to her. "Sit down, Lieuten-

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ant. Can I get you a drink or something?"

"No, thank you. Could you tell me who was your husband's physician?"

"Dr. Bradford. He has offices in the Stanley Building."

"Did your husband ever see a Dr. Gavin?"

Her eyes flickered. "He never mentioned the name. And I've never heard it before."

Like hell, I thought, but I said, "Do you know any reason why your husband should have gone to the Medical Arts Building?"

"None at all."

"Was he ill? Depressed?"

She drew a cigarette from a pack on the cocktail table. "Not as far as I knew."

"Do you know any reason why he might have wanted to take his life?"

"Was it suicide?"

"We don't know yet."

"And if not that?"

"Possibly an accident. We're working on all possibilities."

She studied me and I had the feeling that if I weren't investigating her husband's death, she might sit closer.

"Did your husband carry an insurance policy?"

She smiled carefully. "It was for only fifty thousand. He was worth ten times that."

I stood up. "I may be back again."

The smile remained. "Of course."

At headquarters, Lieutenant O'Brien dropped into my office. "You still set for tonight? Or will this case keep you in town?"

"I can fold it up for a day or two," I said. "I don't think anybody's going to run away."

"Should I pick you up?"

"No. It's a long way across town. I'll take my car to your place and we can leave it in your garage when we take off." But I wondered whether I would really see him tonight. It all depended on what happened. Or what didn't happen.

I spent the rest of the day at my desk putting together the things I suspected about the Fraser death, the things I knew, and the thing I would have to verify. I thought it had probably gone this way:

Dr. Gavin and Fraser's wife had been having an affair. Fraser had learned about it and had gone to Gavin's office before either Miss Nevins or Amos Howell had arrived. He had found Gavin alone and there had been words, threats. They had led to a struggle and Gavin had killed Fraser.

But then Gavin had been faced with a problem. How could he get rid of the body? He couldn't

carry it out of his suite into the corridor. He would certainly be seen. And Miss Nevens was due back in a few minutes.

If the murder had occurred in the waiting room, he had dragged Fraser's body into his office and locked the door. A short while later he had heard Howell enter the waiting room, and a few minutes after, Miss Nevens. He was trapped in his own office with Fraser's body.

Should he quietly leave his office through the corridor and phone back? Should he tell Miss Nevens he wouldn't be in that evening and have her cancel all appointments? Should he come back later, in the early hours of the morning when no one was likely to be about, and somehow get Fraser's body out of the building?

But then possibly he remembered the cleaning women. They had keys to all the offices. Would one of them discover the body before he could return to get rid of it?

Should he simply drop Fraser's body out of the window? But then surely the police would retrace the body's fall to his own office window. He would be questioned. Investigated. Inevitably they would discover the connection between him and Fraser's wife. And then some idea had

come to him. There *was* one way to make it appear as though Fraser had fallen from another window.

I smiled wryly. But *what* was that idea? I thought about that for a while and then decided to skip over that blank spot for the time being.

So Gavin had arranged the fall and then had silently left his office by the corridor door. He had remained away until he heard the sirens and then returned and found Howell and Miss Nevens at the window of the waiting room. But he had also seen something else—Fraser's hat still on the hat-rack.

There had been only one thing to do. He had taken the hat into his office, pretending it was his own, and hoping that neither Miss Nevens nor Howell would notice—or mention it if they did. Later that evening he had probably gotten rid of Fraser's hat.

I considered some other possibilities. Had Gavin and Mrs. Fraser conspired to murder Fraser? That seemed unlikely. If they had, they would certainly have arranged for Fraser to die in some place other than Gavin's office.

Had he told Mrs. Fraser what had happened? I doubted that too. He would gain nothing if he did. He would simply add to his dan-

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ger, something he'd try to avoid.

Did she suspect what had happened? Perhaps. But she wouldn't go to the police. The death of her husband apparently meant little to her, and she had the consolation of his estate if it did. If she went to the police, her affair with Gavin would come out into the open. I didn't think she wanted that.

I glanced at my watch and then put all the information I had on the case in my desk and locked it.

That evening Mavis watched me pack. "Aren't you going to change to your hunting clothes?"

"I have to drop in at headquarters first to sign a couple of reports. I'll change when I get to O'Brien's place." I picked up the duffel bag and the cased rifle. "Goodbye, honey."

She almost shrugged. "Have a good time."

Downstairs, I put my gear in the trunk of my car and drove a block and a half before I made a U-turn and parked. I waited.

Thirty minutes later Philip Thompson's car pulled up in front of my apartment building. Mavis must have been waiting. She came out of the building carrying a small over-night bag.

I followed them down Humboldt and across the bridge to the east side. The buildings here were tired and old, and the streets dirty

and badly lit. His car turned into a parking lot behind a shabby red brick hotel.

I parked in the shadows half a block down the street and watched my rear view mirror. They reappeared around the corner of the building and entered the hotel.

I lit a cigarette and smoked it, and then another. I took the .38 out of my pocket and checked it. Two cartridges would be enough. Or would I use a third one on myself? I wasn't sure about that much yet.

I walked back to the hotel and entered the lobby. It was musty and empty, and there was no one at the desk. Probably the night clerk had gone out for coffee. I swiveled the register. They had signed as Mr. and Mrs. Charles Swanson. Room 406.

I glanced up at the old-fashioned pendulum clock hanging on the wall. It was almost eight-thirty. I started for the elevator, but then I stopped and turned. I stared at the clock for almost a minute. And then I smiled.

My eyes went to the keyboard. The key to 406 was gone, but 408 was still there. With hotel numbering, that would be the room next door.

I stepped around the desk and was about to reach for the key when I changed my mind. Some-

one might notice and remember that the key to 408 was missing. But the clerk probably had a set of duplicates somewhere about.

I searched through drawers until I found a jumble of keys. I put the one tagged 408 into my pocket. I went to the switchboard and made the connection to room 406.

When Philip Thompson answered, I slurred my voice. "Hello, Charley? This is Fred."

"Fred?"

"Sure. Remember the Sportman's Bar? Toledo?"

"Look, mister," Thompson said irritably, "I never heard of you before and I've never been in Toledo. You got the wrong party."

"Now, Charley," I said, "Don't give me that. Not to an old pal. I'll be right up with the bottle."

"Hold it!" Thompson snapped. "Where are you?"

"In the lobby."

Thompson swore. "I'll be right down."

I went to the automatic elevator and rode it to the fourth floor.

When the door slid back Thompson was just approaching. He had been frowning angrily, but now his eyes widened as he saw me and the .38 in my hand. His face whitened. "Wait a minute, Mike . . ."

"Shut up," I said. "Turn around and keep walking. All the way to

room 408. And no talking either."

He walked slowly, glancing back apprehensively. I followed him to 408 and unlocked the door. "Get inside." I closed the door behind us.

"Mike," he said quickly. "I can explain. You can't . . ."

"Shut up," I said again. "Turn around and face the wall."

He did as he was told. "Mike . . ."

I reversed my pistol and brought the butt down hard on the back of his head. I caught him as he fell and lowered him to the floor.

I went to the window and used my handkerchief when I opened it. Below me the sparse evening traffic moved slowly by. I leaned out and looked to my left. The lighted window belonged to room 406—where Mavis waited for Thompson to return.

I turned out my own lights and dragged Thompson to the window. Now I would get rid of him in the same way Dr. Gavin had gotten rid of Fraser.

I draped Thompson over the sill, and bracing my feet against the radiator, I grasped his ankles and eased him all the way out of the window. And then I began swinging him slowly back and forth, back and forth . . . like the pendulum of a clock. And when the arc was big enough so

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that I thought he would fall to a point almost directly below the window to my left, I let go.

I watched him fall and land and then I closed the window. I locked the door and went down the rear stairs. When I got to my car I could hear sirens in the distance. I drove on to O'Brien's house.

I ran into Dr. Gavin in a downtown bar almost eight months later. We nodded and I ordered a bourbon and water. He stirred his own drink. "Anything new on Thurmond Fraser?"

"No. The case is pretty much stalled."

"You don't even know if it was an accident? Or suicide?" He hesitated. "Or anything else?"

I smiled slightly. "I don't want to destroy your confidence in the police force, but there are some cases we never do solve."

My drink came and he pushed a bill toward the bartender. "This one's on me."

I sipped the drink. Yes, I could have solved the Fraser case and sent Gavin to prison. But if I did that, someone else might begin to wonder what really had happened to Philip Thompson.

And so I had altered my reports to eliminate any mention of Fraser's hat, and the fact that Gavin and Mrs. Fraser had ever known

each other. Anyone reading them would find a case that ran up against a blank wall.

Gavin cleared his throat. "I've been reading about . . . about your wife in the newspapers. Do you really think she pushed Thompson out of that window?"

I tried to sound positive. "Of course not."

"But her fingerprints were on the window sill."

"She heard the sirens below," I said. "It was natural for her to go to the window, open it, and look down."

"But if she didn't push him out of the window, and if he didn't jump—and she admits that—then just what do you think really *did* happen?"

"I don't know," I said. "But the jury thought it was murder."

He glanced at my reflection in the bar mirror. "I admire the way you stood by her at the trial. I mean—under the circumstances—she was with another man . . ." He stopped and watched the bartender mix a drink. "Twenty years. That's a long time in prison. Especially for a woman. By the time she gets out she'll have lost . . ." He let it hang there. "Do you get to see her sometimes? Visitor's day?"

"Yes," I said. "Once a month." And I enjoy every minute of it.